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Disclosing the Ultimate Mediterranean Cubist Village. Place, Identity and Politics in Eduardo Viana's Olhão Landscapes

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Abstract

This article studies the early 1920s Olhão views painted by Eduardo Viana (1881–1967). It analyzes Viana's turn to Algarvian-Mediterranean landscapes, while considering the emergence of Olhão as the Portuguese "cubist village" rendered just before its regionalization by the fascist cultural industry. I contend that Viana's vistas stem from his cosmopolitan profile and earlier avant-garde experiences, suggesting also that Olhão's Mediterranean "cubist"-built environment offered Viana the prospect of a denationalized geography. The relationship between identity, place and politics will therefore be discussed.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as paisagens de Olhão pintadas por Eduardo Viana (1881–1967) no início da década de 1920. Discute-se o interesse de Viana pela paisagem Algarvia-Mediterrânica à luz da descoberta de Olhão como "vila cubista", no momento que antecede a sua regionalização pela indústria cultural do fascismo. Defendo que estas vistas decorrem do perfil cosmopolita e das experiências anteriores do artista, sugerindo também que a paisagem mediterrânica "cubista" de Olhão ofereceu a Viana a representação de uma geografia desnacionalizada. A relação entre identidade, lugar e política será discutida.

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This article takes the early 1920s Olhão landscapes by the avant-garde Portuguese painter Eduardo Viana (1881–1967) as its main focus of analysis. It observes Viana's turn to Algarvian-Mediterranean referents in his painting, while looking into the concurrent discovery of Olhão as the unparalleled Portuguese “cubist village”.

The Olhão landscapes were displayed in Viana's third solo exhibition, held at the National Society of Fine Arts in Lisbon in January 1923. By focusing on these artworks, I want to discuss the tension I find between these painted landscapes and the regional-nationalist kind of reception they have prompted, namely the contrast between the tenor of extant criticism (and later that of a formalist, “vertical”-oriented art historical writing), and the avant-garde cosmopolitan profile of Viana's work. I want to observe this group of paintings in a broad historical framework, taking their *politics of form*,¹ as well as the political dimension of the artistic field into account. By political dimension of the artistic field I mean not only the different positions taken within the field, but also the many threads linking the artistic field with other cultural spheres.

So, my point here is to deepen the analysis of Viana's Olhão landscapes beyond stylistic-formal considerations, and the description of the artist's *oeuvre*, studying first and foremost their historical conditions of production, presentation, and reception. By so doing, I will also acknowledge the importance of *place* in modernist landscape painting, therefore intersecting the discussion launched by the British art historian Christopher Green in 2005 about George Braque's L'Estaque cubist landscapes.²

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¹ The expression is taken from Patricia Leighton's *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

² Christopher Green, “A Denationalized Landscape? Braque's Early Cubist Landscapes and Nationalist Geography”. *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914*, edited by June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 2005). Green shows how Braque's landscapes could speak within the discourse of French nationalism: “not in relation to the patriotic extremes represented by, say, a Maurice Barrès, but rather in relation to those beliefs and assumptions about the French nation with which not only Barrès but the great majority of the French could identify: the ballast at the dead centre of French nationalism in most of its political forms across a spectrum from the right all the way down to the centre left of Party Radical republicanism” (246).

Green asserts Braque's inevitable debt towards Vidalian geography, and by extension that “the way he painted landscape in 1908–1909 conforms at one level to widely and deeply held beliefs about French identity and France”.³ I share Green's argument about the value of place entirely, yet arrive to an opposite hypothesis. That is, I argue that Viana's turn to Olhão conveyed a denationalized approach to its unique Mediterranean landscape. I will support Viana's non-identitarian approach to that landscape knowing that it goes against the grain. In fact, Viana's vistas appear at the height of the construction of the nationalist consensus that would pave the way for the rise of a fascist regime.⁴ Under those circumstances, Olhão's exception would eventually dissolve into an epitome for the entire Algarve region.

My argument is structured in a three-stage sequence built to de-naturalize the narrative thread. Therefore, I begin by examining the conditions of the presentation of the Olhão landscapes at Viana's 1923 solo exhibition, introducing the conditions of their in loco production afterwards. In its final stage, this article brings into discussion the conditions of the works' reception by critics and art historians, contrasting the extant opposition between the simultaneous acclamation of these paintings as representatives of the “national spirit” and their condemnation as significant threats to it. Before plunging into the core argument, a brief presentation of the paintings is required.

Viana's Olhão landscapes we are about to observe were painted during his stay in the fishing village in 1922. Four of them share the same dimensions (30.5 x 40 cm), and are oil paintings over wood, whereas the fifth is an oil on canvas, and much larger (85 x 115 cm). The smaller compositions unveil close-ups of the Algarvian coastal landscape, representing the unique aspect of Olhão's white geometrically built environment. One is a tight skywards view (Fig. 1); the others are taken from a higher level (Figs 2, 3 and 4). Writing in the early

³ Christopher Green, “A Denationalized Landscape?”, 246.

⁴ Luís Trindade, *O estranho caso do nacionalismo português* (Lisboa: ICS, 2008).



Figure 1. Eduardo Viana, *View of Olhão/Aspecto de Olhão*, 1922-23, 30.5 x 40 cm, col. Jorge de Brito.



Figure 2. Eduardo Viana, *View of Olhão/Aspecto de Olhão*, 1922-23, 30.5 x 40 cm, Museu Nacional Grão Vasco, Viseu (nº 2397).
© Delfim Ferreira (DGPC/ADF).



Figure 3. Eduardo Viana, *View of Olhão/Outro Aspecto de Olhão*, 1922-23, 30.5 x 40 cm, Museu Nacional Grão Vasco, Viseu (nº2296).
© Alexandra Pessoa (DGPC/ADF).



Figure 4. Eduardo Viana, *View of Olhão/Aspecto de Olhão*, 1922-23, 30.5 x 40 cm, col. Agostinho Fernandes.



Figure 5. Eduardo Viana, *The gipsy lodge/Pousada de ciganos*, 1922–23, 85 x 115 cm, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea-Museu do Chiado, Lisbon (nº851). © Arnaldo Soares (DGPC/ADF).

1990s apropos these canvases, art historian Raquel Henriques da Silva evokes the Moorish memory kept by the fishing village, and asserts that Viana did not choose to paint Olhão by chance. Following Gertrude Stein's insight about Picasso's 1907 *Horta del Ebro* landscapes, she nevertheless writes that Olhão was not a subject in itself but a finding that allowed Viana to explore a "plastic system" he had already defined.

About 15 years earlier, Picasso had been inspired by similar circumstances, during his sojourn in *Horta del Ebro* in 1907 and, based on the paintings he made there, Gertrude Stein states that Cubism was born there, in view of the geometrical lines of *Horta del Ebro's* traditional architecture. In fact, for Picasso those landscapes were a chance hit and not a reason in themselves. The same applies to Viana who, in this series, limits

himself to deepen the plastic system he had defined in previous years.⁵

Landscapes not being a reason in themselves means that the author considers Viana's formal compositions autonomous. In most art history writing on early cubist landscapes the places that Picasso and Braque depicted are likewise "treated not as important in their own right, but merely points of departure for those new ways of seeing and painting which would be called cubist".⁶

The remaining vista is titled "The gipsy lodge" (Fig. 5). It is significantly bigger than the others. Again, we find a landscape dominated by the white

⁵ Raquel Henriques da Silva, "Paisagens de Olhão" [catalogue text], *Eduardo Viana* (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 1992), 151. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

⁶ Christopher Green, "A Denationalized Landscape?", 243.

walls of a geometrical architecture, painted with the same earthy and bluish tones. Only this time, there is a more distanced viewpoint, and a golden evening sunlight with several figures in the foreground: wagons, animals, tents, and groups of people are part of this landscape. They conform rather unindividualized figure types rendered in simple colour strokes and projected shadows.

Conditions of Presentation

As previously mentioned, the Olhão landscapes were displayed in Viana's third solo exhibition, held at the National Society of Fine Arts in Lisbon—he had his first solo exhibition in Porto (Galeria Misericórdia, 1919–1920) and then another individual show in Lisbon (at an antique shop on Rua Nova do Almada, 1921). The exhibition at the Society of Fine Arts took place between January and February 1923, under the patronage of the leading avant-garde magazine published in Lisbon since May 1922—*Contemporânea* (Contemporary)—run by the architect José Pacheco.⁷

Because an exhibition catalogue was published, we know that the show included a large group of paintings depicting Olhão. There is a first group of eight paintings named “Aspects of Olhão”, among which stood the vistas mentioned above, including “The gipsy lodge” that stands out in the catalogue both for the individual title and attributed price.⁸ A second group of ten paintings identified as “Outskirts of Olhão” included another painting representing the Romani. All these paintings made in Olhão were priced the same amount (500 reis), except for the “The gipsy lodge”, rated 10 times more than the rest of the Olhão pieces.

Another relevant fact about the conditions in which the Olhão landscapes were presented is the circumstance of their exhibition venue at the National Society of Fine Arts. This fact is troublesome in itself, because less than two years earlier Eduardo Viana's

application to become an associate had been rejected by the conservative board of that institution (November 1921). As we shall see, the rejection caused a major scandal, with a significant number of protests reaching the press in no time.

Eduardo Viana was a rather prominent figure in the Portuguese artistic circles of that time, as he had played a major part in the war-period avant-garde. Indeed, from 1915 onwards there are many signs of a dynamic avant-garde network in Portugal that included not only local-based artists and poets, but also a significant number of Parisian-based Portuguese artists, as well as foreign artists, fleeing from the war. They were all committed to the renewal of aesthetic canons, further embracing expectations of a wider cultural and social reconfiguration.⁹ Their provocative claims and actions caused major scandals that disturbed the bourgeois *status quo* and were promptly repressed. Involved in scandalous initiatives were self-proclaimed futurists—such as the painters Guilherme Santa Rita (1889–1918) and Almada Negreiros (1893–1970)—, the poets Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) and Mário de Sá-Carneiro (1890–1916), the architect, gallery owner and editor José Pacheco (1885–1934), and former Parisian-based artists such as Amadeo de Souza Cardoso (1887–1918) and Viana, all of whom were deeply implicated in the paramount modernist journals *Orpheu* (1915) and *Portugal Futurista* (Futurist Portugal, 1917).¹⁰

Like many of his fellow Portuguese artists, Viana had left early for Paris. He lived there, working, travelling, and studying, for almost 10 years, from 1905 up to the outbreak of the First World War. Nevertheless, his Parisian work is included in the “unheard of” majority. Unlike his painter friend Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Eduardo Viana did not build a Parisian career, meaning that his work was not showcased in any international circuit of exhibitions or exchanges. As so many other peripheral artists living in Paris, Viana kept exhibiting his artworks at

⁷ Available online at <http://ric.slihi.pt/Contemporanea/revista>

⁸ *Exposição Eduardo Viana: III Exposição organizada pela Contemporânea* (Lisboa: Imprensa Libanio da Silva, 1923). The whereabouts of most paintings is difficult to trace and remains unknown.

⁹ The solidarity between aesthetics and social concerns leads us to the classic definition of the avant-garde by Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁰ See José-Augusto França, *A Arte em Portugal no século XX* (Lisboa: Bertrand, 1991).



Figure 6. Robert Delaunay, *Bulletin de souscription pour l'album n°1 des expositions mouvantes nord-sud-est-ouest*, c. 1915–16, 113 x 314 mm, Modern Art Centre — Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

national venues, and even sold a 1914 canvas to the National Museum of Contemporary Art.¹¹ Moreover, when Viana returned to Portugal fleeing from the war, he took on a leading role in the cosmopolitan avant-garde, cultivating high-profile international ambitions. That is, from 1915 onward, Viana developed his work in the scope of the Corporation Nouvelle he put together with his friends Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Sonia and Robert Delaunay and José de Almada Negreiros (Fig. 6).¹² As Pascal Rousseau's landmark studies have shown, Corporation Nouvelle was not only about the networking of artists living in various parts of the country during the war—Vila do Conde and Amarante in the Porto district, and Lisbon.¹³ It was also noticeable because they put forward collective projects involving proposed collaborations with poets and artists living abroad aimed at an international audience.¹⁴

The end of the war affected this cosmopolitan moment of the Portuguese avant-garde on the account of the failure of all of Corporation Nouvelle's projects, the Delaunays' return to Spain, and the tragic deaths of Amadeo de Souza Cardoso and Guilherme Santa Rita. On the other hand, Lisbon got to see the Ballets Russes before the end of the decade, and in 1922, the *Contemporânea* magazine was launched paying homage to the *Orpheu* "generation". In the beginning of the 1920s, Eduardo Viana, Almada Negreiros and Fernando Pessoa towered as heroic first generation modernists in Lisbon's cultural milieu.¹⁵ The foundations of a nationalist interpretation of Viana's work were laid in that moment, when the expectations of cultural and social change supported by avant-garde movements fuelled identitarian tropes long backed by right wing politics,¹⁶ in striking opposition to their cosmopolitan-by-choice

¹¹ See Diogo de Macedo, "O Pintor Eduardo Viana e a sua Exposição", *Atlântida*, 42 (1919), 812–814.

¹² See Ana Vasconcelos (editor), *O Círculo Delaunay/The Delaunay Circle* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2015).

¹³ Particularly important is Pascal Rousseau's, *La Aventura Simultânea: Sonia y Robert Delaunay en Barcelona* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1995).

¹⁴ The *Corporation Nouvelle* embraced the collaboration of Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), Blaise Cendrars (1887–1961), the Russian painter Daniel Rossini (1888–1944) and, later, that of Scandinavian artists, via the Italian Stockholm-based painter-gallerist Arturo Ciacelli (1883–1966). Moreover, their main exhibition projects were destined to Stockholm and Barcelona. See Ana Vasconcelos (editor), *O Círculo Delaunay/The Delaunay Circle*.

¹⁵ José-Augusto França, *Os Anos Vinte em Portugal* (Lisboa: Presença, 1992).

¹⁶ As David Cottington puts it, in his analysis of the French *avant-guerre*, "the avant-garde was both structured in large part by the intersection of the same dominant and counter discourses that articulated those wider [political] struggles, and instrumental in shaping and disseminating these. Thus the discourse of nationalism: checked on the political level by the outcome of the Dreyfus Affair and victory of the Dreyfusard forces, nationalist agitation after 1905 found its expression on a cultural level, in an effort of elaboration and dissemination of a doctrine, an ethic and an aesthetic for which the concepts of tradition and classicism were cardinal points of reference." David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905–1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

modernist counterpart *International*.¹⁷ As we are about to see, despite a growing nationalist approach to his work, the pitch of Viana's modernist aura did not cease to cause a major dread to the National Society of Fine Arts' conservative board.

Viana's rejection as an associate by the Society of Fine Arts in 1921 prompted a major dissent within the Portuguese intellectual and artistic milieus. His defence was tackled in the media by two young writers and journalists, one of whom was António Ferro (1895–1956), the future head of the fascist national propaganda agency (SPN).¹⁸ Following this event, José Pacheco, future director of *Contemporânea* (published from May 1922 onward) planned what the art historian José-Augusto França called "a coup d'état" in the Society of Fine Arts. As is well known, Pacheco conceived a modernist take-over of the institution based on the creation of an unexpected modernist majority of associates that would dismiss its board.¹⁹ The operation failed, as a timely amendment to the statutes ensured that new members were not eligible for the board.

It is impossible to mention Viana's 1923 exhibition where the Olhão landscapes were showcased without considering this earlier episode, which confirmed Viana's leading role in the unceasing dispute for modern art. The friction generated in 1921 is very much present in 1923, well embedded in the historical conditions of the presentation of the Olhão landscapes at the Society of Fine Arts headquarters, chosen (rented) as the venue by the

very same *Contemporânea* magazine that Pacheco edited.²⁰ Without question, Viana's exhibition had not been a Society of Fine Arts' initiative, as the opposing arguments of conservative (academicist) and modern art supporters endured, but the truth is that many modern art shows happened there. It is crucial to keep in mind that the idea of a plain two-party artistic milieu pervading most Portuguese art history writing obscures the more complex reality in which Viana and his contemporaries lived. The growing pervasiveness of nationalism in its many versions, and the possible resistance to it, are part of that complexity.²¹

Conditions of Production

The Olhão landscapes series was, of course, painted *in loco*.

After a brief exploratory visit to Olhão in February 1922, Eduardo Viana settled in the Algarvian village in April, and stayed there for a month, revisiting the place later in September and December to resume unfinished works for the forthcoming exhibition.²² Olhão was an important fishing village but had absolutely no tradition of artists' seasonal stays. And yet, in the early 1920s, the village became an attractive location for Viana. What caught the attention of Viana in this southern village? Why did Olhão take the spotlight?

Ricardo Agarez opened his key study about modernism, regionalism, and architecture in the south of Portugal with the statement:

¹⁷ I particularly refer to the meaning of cosmopolitan as "a new form of internationalism" emerging in the nineteenth century, during which "nationalism had been opposed by the internationalism of Marx and socialism, which had spoken for, without being able to ensure, the rights and welfare of the international working class, who were frequently more subjects than citizens" as discussed by Robert Young, "The Cosmopolitan Idea and National Sovereignty", Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (editors), *Cosmopolitanisms* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 197–198. Moreover, by cosmopolitan-by-choice I specifically refer to the avant-garde as anticipating Homi Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism", that is a view that "takes the position of a negative political ontology and suggests that the commitment to a 'right to difference in equality' as a process of constituting emergent groups and affiliations has less to do with the affirmation or authentication of origins or 'identities,' and more to do with political practices and ethical choices." Homi Bhabha, "Spectral Sovereignty, Vernacular Cosmopolitans, and Cosmopolitan Memories", *Cosmopolitanisms*... , 212.

¹⁸ See *Ilustração Portuguesa* (26/11/1921). Ferro had been associated with the *Orpheu* journal as its mock editor (because, being only 14 years old he was unaccountable). The other journalist was João Ameal and his text appeared in the *Diário de Lisboa* (6/12/1921) with the following title: "A question/The rights of the new: This case involving the National Society of Fine Arts is a clear symptom of the frightened campaign of the bourgeois against the artist".

¹⁹ See J.-A. França, *Os Anos Vinte em Portugal*, 151.

²⁰ This fact is demonstrated by the tone of the interview that José Pacheco gives in March 1923 to the Algarvian journalist working for the *Revista Portuguesa* (Portuguese Magazine) directed by Victor Falcão: "And, because we were talking of the Modern Generation, came to the conversation the celebrated, the widely commented case of the National Society of Fine Arts. — Let us take this demonstration of new values and ask the Minister of Education to inspect the National Society of Fine Arts, because it has forged its Statutes, and therefore the reason the State created it. Whether the State intervenes or not, we are determined to take care of the fine arts, for better or worse!" (*Revista Portuguesa*. N. 1, 10 March 1923)

²¹ For a thorough discussion of this matter see Luís Trindade, *O estranho caso do nacionalismo português* (Lisboa: ICS, 2008) for whom, nevertheless, the nationalist consensus meets no opposition in any modernist cultural practices. See also Patrícia Esquivel, *Teoria e Crítica de Arte em Portugal (1921-1940)* (Lisboa: Colibri, IHA, 2007).

²² The local press greets the newcomer in April 6 (*Correio Olhanense*, Ano 1, n. 19, 06/04/1922, 2). On May 4 1922, the same *Correio Olhanense* informs that Viana left for Portimão (another Algarvian town) to paint "views of Praia da Rocha". The presence of Viana in Olhão is again mentioned on September 28 and December 7 1922, the former explicitly mentioning the completion of paintings in view of the forthcoming exhibition.

The Algarve is not only the southernmost region of Portugal or one of the most exploited for tourism. Uniquely Mediterranean (and North African) in an Atlantic country, historically and culturally differentiated, its building traditions were essential markers of its specificity and attracted long since the attention of both picturesque-driven, conservative observers, and modernists who, as in Capri and Ibiza, found there examples of modernism *avant la lettre*. Both modernism and the popular building traditions commonly known as ‘vernacular’ played leading roles in the construct of a contemporary building identity for the Algarve, making this region the ideal ground for a close-up observation of the exchanges between modernism and regionalism.²³

Olhão plays a leading part in shaping this story. In fact, the fishing village became a synecdoche for the Algarve, its local distinctiveness dissolved into the expression of the entire region and re-signified as a nationalistic motto for touristic propaganda by the fascist regime. Yet, for a brief period in the early 1920s, this unparalleled urban landscape seems to have had, at least for Eduardo Viana, the appeal of a cosmopolitan, necessarily denationalized, symbolic dimension associated to its disclosure as the ultimate Mediterranean cubist village.

Although Olhão’s buildings shared significant characteristics with the rest of the Algarvian houses—whitewashed walls, terraced roofs and decorated chimneys that look “as graceful as minarets”—its urban landscape stood out for its elemental geometrical structure, making it resemble a fragment of an east Mediterranean or a North African village.²⁴ Writing a book about fishermen, the Portuguese writer Raul Brandão visited Olhão precisely in August 1922 and remarked on the singular aesthetic effect of its built environment:

During the morning I go out in Olhão in awe. Cobalt blue sky—beneath the lime slabs. Sun reverberation,

and the blue bluer, the white whiter. Cubes, geometric lines, shimmering animal light vibrates like the wings of a cicada. Between the terraces a round dome, swollen as a breast pointing its nib into the air. And in the evening, upon this immaculate white, the sunset stands like a great refugence. It is an oriental land that I discover; only the slim minarets are missing.²⁵

Raul Brandão’s use of terms such as “cubes” and “geometric lines”, echoes the fresh association of Olhão’s built environment to cubism. The relationship between Olhão and cubism had been recently put forward by a local intellectual while paying homage to a local poet, João Lúcio. In 1905, Lúcio published a book titled “My Algarve”, which was mainly associated with Olhão, where he was born and bred. The poet portrays a Moorish atmosphere, made of labyrinthine alleys and white washes, bringing again and again the trope of mystery that spellbinds Orientalism.²⁶ This is clearly pointed out by Francisco Fernandes Lopes in his 1921 homage to the deceased poet. The text specifically highlights the closeness of Olhão not only to Spanish-Andalusian settlements, like Cádiz, but also to North African towns like Tangier and Tunis.²⁷ Lopes also highlights the Moorish Orientalism of Lúcio’s hometown, stating that “Olhão is the least Portuguese of all Algarve lands.” And then continues:

It is the Olhão of the *soteias* [roof terraces] and *mirantes* [watchtowers], the arches, and the small alleys . . . , the free cluster of Cubist houses, rising—one would say—in a kind of incessant aspiration to Allah, invisible behind the high blue dome that lights up at night from a thousand hanging lamps; the moonlight and pictorial Olhão, of the Moorish fields, and also the Olhão of the . . . beautiful enchanted Moorish girls”²⁸

The epitome of “cubist village” would immediately reverberate in the local press endorsed by another

²³ Ricardo Agarez, *Algarve Building* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 23.

²⁴ As early as 1894, Júlio Lourenço Pinto writes that: “Olhão’s structure, perhaps more than that of any other Algarvian village, evokes the sight of a Moroccan settlement; (. . .) most houses stick to the ground-floor, as white as they can be (. . .) uniformly crowned with terraces, twin siblings of the African azoteas” (quoted by Agarez, *Algarve Building*, 27).

²⁵ Raúl Brandão, *Os Pescadores* (Lisboa: Aillaud & Bertrand, 1923), 270-271.

²⁶ See Edward Said’s classic study *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

²⁷ “Olhão arose almost magically here, in this nostalgic border of Portuguese land, in the image and likeness of the Algarve-out-in-the-sea, in Tangier, in Laranche, in Arzila, to Oran or Tunis . . . , and from the Algarve-out-in-the-Peninsula, in Cadiz, Seville and all over the Spanish-Andalusian coast.”; Francisco Fernandes Lopes, *Sobre o poeta João Lúcio* (Faro, Tip. União, 1921), 18.

²⁸ Francisco Fernandes Lopes, “Sobre o poeta João Lúcio”, 18.

prominent Olhão-born intellectual, José Dias Sancho.²⁹ Sancho attributes the singular combination of roof terraces and watchtowers that define the Moorish appearance of Olhão's white urban geometrical landscape to the intensive commercial exchanges maintained with Morocco.

Just six months later, Olhão's cubist landscape reached the capital via António Ferro (Viana's champion in November 1921 and future head of the fascist regime's cultural policy), who would establish an unexpected association between the Society of Fine Arts "crisis" and Olhão. In a short article published on January 14, 1922, we learn that "in the midst of the controversy between the old and the new, regarding the National Society of Fine Arts, Olhão emerged in the conflict". As Ferro put it, Olhão came to the fore because of a project for a monument to the poet João Lúcio destined for the Algarvian village which, because of its *pompier*, academic style would completely damage the modern "cubist" specificity of Olhão's urban landscape. Ferro addresses his readers:

Believing that it is an ordinary village, the author of the monument is sure that Olhão is the most appropriate background for his work . . . But he is wrong. We reproduce today a view of Olhão—and you all may see if this land, that is easy to imagine as cobalt blue of sea and sky, you all may see if this geometrical, drawn land, with terraced roofs, almost cubist—is an ordinary village.³⁰

We begin to grasp why the Algarvian "cubist village" was far from being a neutral, or chance destination for Eduardo Viana. Why Olhão mattered as a *place*. Seen from a cultured viewpoint, the elemental geometry of its urban landscape could be inscribed in a constellation of Mediterranean sites where cubism, and modern art, found significant primeval roots. Olhão therefore fitted a cultural geography made of places that, for different reasons, superseded their plain location and ordinary living experiences, to be re-signified as an imaginary common

ground by the international community drawing the map of modern art.

Indeed, arriving from a short Parisian sojourn only a few days after Ferro's article appeared, in January 1922, Viana referred to the international avant-garde summing up his impression on "the strongest current of French art today". Responding to an interviewer, he claimed: "Still the cubists. Always the cubists. Nobody discusses them anymore. There are already evaders. However, those who are coming out of cubism keep carrying it a little in their palette. They all go through Cubism today."³¹

The consonance between the abiding relevance of cubism for the international avant-garde, as expressed by Viana,³² and the extreme localness of the timely emergence of Olhão as a "cubist village" matches much of the spirit and politics of the Corporation Nouvelle. In fact, as different as they may be, the Olhão landscapes exhibited in 1923 share qualities found in Corporation Nouvelle's projects back in the war years. As mentioned earlier, Corporation Nouvelle's main goals were the organization of exhibitions and the production of collective albums destined to an international audience. Based in ultra-peripheral places, the collective constitutes a relevant example of the articulation between local artistic production and the cosmopolitan-transnational focus and networking of the avant-garde. As I discuss elsewhere, it is not only the fact that the peripheral geography in which they operated is not perceived as hindrance, or as opposing their international ambitions, but also the fact that both the collective works destined to the album and the individual paintings produced by these artists between 1915 and 1916 address local landscape in a way that always supersedes identitarian-nationalist formulas.³³ In

²⁹ "O Pintor Eduardo Viana chegado ante-ontem duma fugida a Paris conta-nos as suas impressões. Sempre o cubismo!", *Diário de Lisboa* (18 January 1922).

³² As Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton stressed, cubism "arguably the seminal art movement of the twentieth century, initiated a pictorial revolution through its radical approach to imagemaking, employing some of the most important features of modernism". The movement brought in a visual culture turn, in the sense that there is "post-cubist aesthetics" that "transformed not just subsequent painting, sculpture and photography, but also architecture and design of everything from furniture to clothing to objects of everyday use"; Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 7.

³³ Joana Cunha Leal, "A Long-Distance Call? Social Space and Corporation Nouvelle's Places of Production." *Visual Resources* N. 35: 3–4, 2019, 323–352 (DOI: 10.1080/01973762.2018.1493560).

²⁹ José Dias Sancho, "Olhão — Uma vila cubista", *Correio do Sul*. — N.70 (11 de julho 1921), 1–2.

³⁰ António Ferro, "Olhão, terra cubista", *Ilustração Portuguesa* (14 January 1922), 43.

other words, Corporation Nouvelle's primitivism is cosmopolitan-by-choice, since it is not about the affirmation or authentication of origins or 'identities'.³⁴ It fertilizes local referents transferring them into the avant-garde transnational world of reference. No matter how specific, geographical markers of their places of production achieve new general meanings in this process.

The watercolours made by Amadeo de Souza Cardoso in order to prepare the stencils that would be used in the album are representative of that fertilization. Cardoso brings in concrete architectural references to Corporation Nouvelle's places of production, cherishing the Amarante Bridge, the Vila do Conde Aqueduct or the D. Maria Bridge in Porto. The latter, built by Gustave Eiffel, is clearly recognizable in two watercolours. The fact that this local structure owed its construction to the world-famous architect of the Eiffel Tower adds a layer of meaning to the representation of place. What becomes visible, then, is the cosmopolitan connotation that this place also contains.³⁵ This double meaning helps us to understand the complexity of Corporation Nouvelle artists' experience of their places of production and, by extension, how much Viana's vistas re-enact that organic confluence in the experience of a place that is both local and cosmopolitan due to its unique characteristics. Again, seen from a knowledgeable viewpoint, Olhão's Mediterranean traits fostered an experience of place that exceeds regional identitarian formulas, as its local specificity is made to connote the world of primitivist elemental forms in which there are no national boundaries (just like the avant-garde itself). It is both Mediterranean and cubist.

Conditions of Reception

The Olhão landscapes were indeed seen as a menace to the putative *Portugueseness* of Viana's work, by the critic and art historian Reynaldo dos Santos (1880–1970).

The reception of Eduardo Viana's first individual exhibition in Lisbon in May 1921 is at the onset of identitarian discourses that would seize his work. Contrasting with the tenor of earlier criticism highlighting the formal qualities of his modernist painting³⁶—the very qualities that still frightened the Society of Fine Arts' associates later that year—Viana began to be presented as “the interpreter of the Lusíada landscape, the painter of the sun—, who was able to distance himself from photographic skills and therefore is the pride and joy of the Portuguese race”.³⁷ Another, perhaps more sophisticated, approach to Viana's paintings kept the nationalistic intonation, writing that he dismissed “narrative details . . . condensing his emotions in essential lines”, and that he followed the “constructive spirit” inherited from Cézanne, while stating: “Eduardo Viana belongs to the tradition that stimulates and guides today's artists, scrutinizing the soul of the Portuguese land, constructing the pictorial equivalents that fit his emotion.”³⁸

Viana's nationalist appropriation reached its peak with António Ferro. Ferro's article appeared later in November 1921, during the Society of Fine Arts' crisis, no more than a month before he introduced the “cubist village” to the general public. Apropos Viana's painting, Ferro writes that “there are those who deny Eduardo Viana's Portugueseness, his indisputable Portugueseness . . . Eduardo Viana is a Portuguese painter because no one like him can depict our light”.³⁹ The identitarian relevance being attributed to Viana's work is not only key in Ferro's response to the Society of Fine Arts' turn down, but also in reinforcing the nationalist consensus that would support his cultural policy as head of the

³⁶ The most significant examples are Diogo de Macedo's texts for the *Atlântida* magazine; “O Pintor Eduardo Viana e a sua Exposição”, *Atlântida*, 42 (1919), 812–814 and “Eduardo Viana e a sua Pintura”, *Atlântida*, 48 (1920), 345–347.

³⁷ Vitor Falcão, “Eduardo Viana, o pintor do sol”, *Diário de Lisboa* (4 May 1921). The nationalistic tone used to defend Viana echoes the solidarity found by late nineteenth century criticism between landscape painting and the ethnographic documentation of regional (indeed, rural) usages and traditions. Art as a social product is associated with the nation by the most prominent intellectuals, especially Ramalho Ortigão. See: Raquel Henriques da Silva, “O Naturalismo e o Portuguesismo em Pintura”, *João Vaz 1859–1931. Um pintor do naturalismo* (Lisboa: Casa Museu Dr. Anastácio Gonçalves, 2005), 15–26, and Foteini Vlachou, “Natural, Naturalismo, Nacional: Painting Portuguese Nature during the second half of the Nineteenth-Century”. *The Disappointed Writer: Selected Essays* (Lisboa: Edições do Saguão, 2019), 221–236.

³⁸ A. Rodrigues-Pereira, “A Exposição Eduardo Viana”, *Diário de Lisboa* (16 May 1921).

³⁹ António Ferro, “Os Pintores Portugueses: Eduardo Viana”, *Ilustração Portuguesa* (26 November 1921), 413–415.

³⁴ See my reference above to Homi Bhabha's “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (note 18).

³⁵ Joana Cunha Leal, “A Long-Distance Call?”, 330–335.

propaganda agency during the dictatorship. It is worth noticing that this kind of identitarian appropriation affected many artists, including Amadeo de Souza Cardoso.⁴⁰ Clearly, the prevalence of nationalism turned their cosmopolitan-by-choice primitivism into something else: a blind spot, that following the path of regionalism favoured instead a *domestication* of modernism. In Ferro's case, it might be said that his earlier cosmopolitanism had long been shrinking into a nationalized version of modernism based on the easily recognizable promotion of folkloristic cultural expressions.⁴¹

It is precisely a threat to a secure domestication of Viana's painting, based on the crescendo nationalist tone of extant criticism that the art historian Reynaldo dos Santos finds in the Olhão landscapes, especially "The gipsy lodge" (Fig. 5). Santos was trained as a doctor. Indeed, he became a distinguished professor (and later director) at the Lisbon Medical School, while continuously publishing as an art historian on an incredibly vast array of subjects. His work stands out as the height "of an essentialist reading of the Portuguese artistic identity"⁴² that backed the fascist regime's cultural industry. By 1923, Santos had already published four studies on major renaissance subjects, making himself noticeable in the extremely poor Portuguese art historical milieu of that time. As a result, Reynaldo dos Santos, being a rising-star art historian, had a pre-given status when he ventured into art criticism apropos Eduardo Viana's 1923 exhibition.

The long review of the 1923 exhibition he penned for the *Contemporânea* magazine itself tried hard to rescue Viana from the contamination of the "The gipsy lodge", a painting he deemed a particularly "dangerous", and whose prominence was asserted

in the exhibition catalogue by the attributed price.⁴³ That is, Reynaldo dos Santos welcomed "the triumph of his [Viana's] colourist instinct over the paradoxes of the cubist interpretation of forms", and the fact that Viana was not yet "contaminated by the extravagancies in which cubism had degenerated". Nevertheless, the author claims that "The gipsy lodge" did not respect the demands of a balanced, sincere, national expression. It did not conform to that expression because, Santos writes, Viana had denied what he believed were consensual values, instead thriving on "instability" as a compositional value.⁴⁴ The pictorial composition is indeed uneven: following the steep slope, shapes are sucked into the bottom right corner of the canvas; the horizon line reinforces this imbalance, since it is impossible to stabilize it. In Santos eyes, there is definitely a (wrong) politics of form surfacing in that composition or, as he also put it, the danger of "The gipsy lodge" owes nothing to the "gypsy theme".

Besides expressing my doubts about the placidity of the "gypsy theme", which could not but add to the denationalizing effect of the main painting Viana produced in Olhão, it is worth mentioning another compositional effect signalled by Santos in the remaining vistas. The art historian appreciated the fact that they "are built—one might say sculpted—by planes defined by essential values that disregard the accessory in order to intensify chromatic effects", but deeply regretted "that the artist does not always give his compositions the breadth they demand, rather constraining them within the framework of small-scale canvas".⁴⁵ I reckon that by "constrained compositions", Reynaldo dos Santos does not exactly refer only to the small-scale dimension of these canvases, but is also highlighting the kind of close-up composition Viana uses in his "Aspects of Olhão" (as well as in other landscape series he was showing in 1923). The preference for close-up

⁴⁰ In 1925, Ferro writes that Amadeo de Souza Cardoso is "the great precursor" who, having taken Cubism in 1912 "seriously", "Never stopped being Portuguese. Through the intentional geometry of his paintings, through the bright color of his art, one could guess Portugal, the joyful Portugal of the Pilgrimages, of the popular neighborhoods, blue sky, and festive costumes"; António Ferro, "Os artistas do Salão de Outono". *Diário de Notícias* (16 December 1925).

⁴¹ See: Jorge Ramos do Ó, *Os Anos de Ferro, o Dispositivo Cultural durante a "Política do Espírito", 1933-1949*, (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1999); Daniel Melo, *Salazarismo e Cultura Popular (1933-1958)* (Lisboa: ICS, 2001); Luís Trindade, *O Estranho Caso do Nacionalismo Português* (Lisboa: ICS, 2008); and Vera Marques Alves, *Arte Popular e Nação no Estado* (Lisboa: ICS, 2013).

⁴² Nuno Rosmaninho, *A deriva nacional da arte: Portugal, séculos XIX-XX* (Famalicão: Húmus, 2018), 156.

⁴³ Reynaldo dos Santos, "A Exposição Eduardo Viana", *Contemporânea*, 8 (February 1923), 89-91.

⁴⁴ Reynaldo dos Santos, "A Exposição Eduardo Viana", 91.

⁴⁵ Furthermore he states that "the decorative vision that inspires them and the wide way in which he [Viana] paints, would allow them to rise from depiction of the picturesque aspect to the broad conception of a larger art"; Reynaldo dos Santos, "A Exposição Eduardo Viana", 90-91.

pictorial compositions is significant because it no doubt empowers the estrangement effect, I believe, Viana was looking for (see particularly Fig. 1). Far from surrendering to the market constraints that Santos perniciously evokes, these compositions are the result of Viana's will to capture Olhão's geometrical built environment—including the picturesque allure the critic mentions—,⁴⁶ keeping at bay any signs of appeasing domestication. That is, Viana pictorially re-enacts both the density and the qualities asserting Olhão as *the least Portuguese of all Algarve lands*. Therefore, in the representational apparatus by which these paintings depict the Mediterranean geometry of Olhão, *closeness* functions as a *politics of form* via which “picturesque” does not give in to national recognition, but denotes instead the cosmopolitan-by-choice primitivism we find in the transnational world of reference of the avant-garde.

Again, in Viana's painting Olhão's Mediterranean traits endorsed a denationalized landscape, one exceeding regional identitarian formulas, as its local specificity is made to connote the world of primitivist elemental forms in which “identities” do not conform to national boundaries.

As previously mentioned, despite the crystal-clear evidence given by Reynaldo dos Santos' negative criticism, Viana's cosmopolitan choices remained mainly unnoticed and eventually became completely invisible. Given Viana's prominence as a representative of the war-period avant-garde, the idea of his *Portugueseness* became indisputable under the nationalist consensus that would pave the way for António Ferro's cultural policy as head of the national propaganda agency during the dictatorship.

By the same token, Olhão's built environment had to be nationalized. The relationship between the local, the regional and the national would indeed be tightly tied by the fascist regime's cultural policy.⁴⁷ From 1933 onwards, António Ferro's “politics of the spirit” would contribute to solidify the folkloristic grounds of that policy, and by extension to *domesticate* Olhão within the Algarvian-Mediterranean landscape. The success of this endeavor would soon be backed by geography, particularly the studies of Orlando Ribeiro. In 1945, in the best Vidalian tradition, Ribeiro published his pivotal *Portugal between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic*, radically reshaping the geographical representation of a thus far Atlantic country.

⁴⁶ Reynaldo dos Santos, “A Exposição Eduardo Viana”, 90.

⁴⁷ As Agarez shows, rather than standing for conflicting positions, regionalism and nationalism were counterparts in the same process: “a region (province) was then seen as a small-scale fatherland, and regionalism was an indispensable preliminary for true patriotism, instrumental in the process of fabricating national traditions”; Ricardo Agarez, *Algarve Building*, 12.